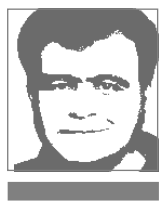
OPINION



BY NIAZ MURTAZA

Choking society

SOCIETIES form state structures to optimise their welfare. But strong societal actors soon capture them for their own interests. The trend is highest in autocracies but not fully absent even in democracies. It invariably leads to conflict with excluded groups, more so if dominant groups impose an elitist economy, cut political freedoms and crush dissent.

We have long been a classic case of such perverse trends. But things have reached unusual depths under this hybrid regime in so many ways. The first one is the huge concentration of political power, vertically from local to the federal level; horizontally from other state pillars to the executive; and laterally from civilians to non-civilians. Civilians were never so hapless in a civilian era.

Courts have faced the most fury for just giving a few mild verdicts against top guns in the twin cities. The constitutional court proposed in the 27th amendment is the last straw to break the back of the crawling camel of a free judiciary. In many states earlier, judges lacked the powers to review constitutional issues or enforce basic rights. Our judges already had such powers. So, we will now have a court to actually end this power via clauses that will pack it with docile judges. There has never been an amendment so devoid of public interest and support, so vividly reflecting civilian servility and so severely harming democracy.

The second way is externally courting dangerous liaisons, fatal attractions and indecent proposals that may increase insecurity. This means personalised ties with a historically unreliable US now under an unusually volatile president for controversial economic and security deals; a risky defence pact with the Saudis; needless armed forays westwards; and possible plans to send boots to Gaza, all without public debate. We are encircled on all sides by insecurity as links among our two internal foes in our north (TTP) and south (BLA) regions and two external foes on our east and west borders rise. The possibility of a more radical TLP spreading chaos in the core from underground could make things worse.

So, we are back with a bang to our decades-old shady business of seeking geostrategic rents from rich states after a few lean years. This leads to the third perverse, economic trend where even a faint whiff of such rents has made this hybrid set-up eagerly end the quest for strong industrialisation that requires serious skills and pursues easier but controversial activities such as mining, crypto, corporate farming, etc. This has cooled ties with a reliable China that could aid strong industrialisation as its tough taskmaster approach of not giving free money and demanding outcomes and accounting doesn't suit our kleptocrats used to easy American money. But China is patient and not jealous knowing this is a brief pause and we will be back to it as soon as Trump's pat on the back turns into a stab in the back.

With their own powers and fortunes ensured, the focus now is on taming mass dissent. Masses suffer doubly from an elitist economy and by the state choking their self-reliant economic pursuits, for example, via curbs on internet work and crackdowns on hawkers and small businesses. The two-headed hybrid beast faces no serious political challenge, but paranoia still runs high as seen by the desire to wrest more power. This partly reflects the grim fate of byzantine setups that fear 'traitors more than foes.

> We have long been a classic case of perverse trends.

Large numbers of dissidents have been jailed or abducted, the media is muffled and protests routinely crushed. Yet, unease persists in the halls of powers as seen in the failed attempt to restore executive magistrates to control the streets better, realising how even such steps have not been able to save autocrats from falling across South Asia.

So, rising political autocracy, economic stagnation, insecurity and external servility are the main bitter fruit of this militarised regime as we oscillate between a dead-end road and a bridge to nowhere under it. Strong economic and political practices are being replaced by vacuous ones and talented persons by docile and incompetent ones. But autarkic societies usually ace autocratic states. We are also a graveyard for cocky regimes that think they are indispensable, invincible and unaccountable. This regime too may fail to beat the trends of history to fall in the dustbin of history soon. But whether even that brings positive change is unclear.■

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BY NASIRA HABIB

Beyond adaptation

PAKISTAN'S agriculture sector is both a victim and a driver of climate change. From floods in Sindh to prolonged dry spells in Balochistan, our farming communities are already living on the front lines of a changing climate. Yet, while farmers are paying the price for global warming, agriculture also contributes significantly to Pakistan's greenhouse gas emissions through the use of fertilisers and pesticides, livestock methane and soil degradation.

The Pakistan Climate Change Policy 2021, an update of the 2012 framework, rightly emphasises the need for adaptation, including the development of heat-tolerant crop varieties, improved livestock breeds and digital simulation models to predict climate impacts. These measures are vital for coping with immediate risks. But there is a fundamental limitation — adaptation alone is not enough.

To secure our agricultural future and align with global climate commitments, Pakistan's policy must move decisively beyond adaptation to embrace mitigation — actions that actually reduce emissions and restore the land's natural carbon balance.

The 2021 climate change policy includes several measures that sound promising: promoting better fertiliser management, biogas systems, improved cattle breeds, and methane control in rice paddies. These indeed have some mitigation value. But in essence, they represent incremental efficiency improvements within the same industrial-agriculture model.

What is missing is a transformational vision — a move away from chemical-intensive monocultures and fossil-fuel dependency towards a more ecological, regenerative, and low-carbon farming system.

The policy's focus on 'better management practices' or 'new breeds' risks entrenching dependence on industrial inputs and imported technologies, rather than strengthening local systems of resilience and sustainability.

If Pakistan is serious about agricultural mitigation, agroecology must take centre stage. Agroecology is not just an organic or low-input method; it is a scientific and social approach that integrates ecological principles into farming — recycling nutrients, enhancing biodiversity, restoring soil health, and eliminating chemical dependency.

An agroecological system emits less methane and nitrous oxide, increases soil carbon sequestration, and uses energy far more efficiently. Importantly, it empowers small farmers and peasant women — the true custodians of our food systems — through knowledge and collective action, not dependence on expensive inputs.

Countries such as India, Brazil, and Kenya have already begun linking agroecological transitions with climate mitigation targets. Pakistan, too, can take this path, but it requires a bold policy realignment. The current policy does not adequately recognise the soil as a carbon sink, nor does it propose mechanisms to measure or reward soil carbon sequestration. It also overlooks agroforestry, compost systems, and cover crops, which can dramatically cut emissions while improving fertility.

Moreover, by emphasising 'high-yield' breeds and 'climate-smart' technologies, the policy risks sidelining indigenous knowledge systems and traditional seed diversity, both of which are vital for ecological balance and long-term resilience. Pakistan needs an integrated framework where climate, agriculture, biodiversity, and rural development policies work in harmony, and not in separate silos.

A genuine climate mitigation strategy for agriculture would include:

> Our climate policy must move to embrace mitigation.

— A national programme for agroecological transition, supported by training, research, and incentives.

— Reduction targets for synthetic fertiliser and pesticide use, replaced by composting and biofertiliser systems.

— Large-scale agroforestry and cover cropping initiatives to increase carbon sinks.

— Support for farmer-led innovation, local seed systems, and gender-inclusive soil management.

— Access to climate finance for low-emission farming initiatives.

Such a transformation would not only cut emissions but also revitalise rural economies, restore biodiversity, and ensure food sovereignty for generations to come. Pakistan's climate change policy urgently needs to move beyond the language of adaptation and efficiency towards a vision of ecological regeneration and carbon reduction. Agroecology provides that path — one that is rooted in local realities, grounded in science, and aligned with the global imperative of climate action.

The future of our food systems — and our planet — depends on how courageously we make that shift today. ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

Smallholders exempted

LAHORE: Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto today [Nov 10] announced exemption from the payment of land revenue, local rates, development cess and all cesses related to land revenue to small landowners [owning] up to twelve acres of irrigated land or 25 acres of unirrigated land with effect from Rabi crop of 1975-76. ...

Addressing the "toiling farmers of our land", the [PM] declared [PPP] removes an inequity which originated since before the time of the Mughals, which was reinforced by colonial rule and which persisted through twenty-eight years of our independence. Explaining … what the relief meant he said, "from now onwards, more than 85 per cent of the landowners stand exempted from payment of land revenue, local rates and cesses".

Talking about the financial implications of the decision, the [PM] said it would entail a substantial loss of Government revenue at a time "when we need every penny we can spare for our development". He said he had been giving anxious thought to this question. The just demand of the small landowners was rejected time and again on financial grounds. — News agencies

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

Chinese withdrawal

LAKE SUCCESS: A six-Power resolution calling for the withdrawal of Chinese Communist troops from Northern Korea was presented to the UN Security Council today [Nov 10] for consideration. Sponsored by the United States, Britain, Cuba, Ecuador, France and Norway, the resolution calls upon all States and authorities to prevent their nationals giving assistance to North Korean forces. It affirms that it is the policy of the United Nations to hold the Chinese frontier with Korea inviolate and fully to protect legitimate Chinese and Korean interests in the frontier zone. The resolution asks the Security Council to insist that no action be taken which might lead to the spread of the war. It further requests the [UN] Commission on the unification and rehabilitation of Korea to proceed to the areas as soon as possible and to assist in the settlement of frontier problems. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported by our Delhi correspondent,] the Dalai Lama has appealed to the United Nations directly to intervene in Tibet — the invasion of which by the Central Chinese Peoples Republic began about three weeks ago. It is understood here that the Security Council will sit in an emergency meeting to discuss the question.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Clipping the wings of Indian ambitions

THE recent meeting between the defence ministers of the United States and India, culminating in the renewal of the bilateral defence pact through 2035, has been officially framed as a reaffirmation of trust and shared strategic goals, especially by India. However, behind the diplomatic smiles and joint statements lies a quiet, yet profound, redefinition of India's standing in the strategic vision of the US. Practically, the era of India as the centerpiece of American strategy in Asia is over. What remains is a partnership within a constrained framework.

For much of the post-Cold War era, the US strategy in Asia leaned heavily on the idea of India as a regional counterweight to China. India was framed as the lynchpin of American ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, positioned as the natural leader in South Asia expected to shoulder responsibilities for regional stability under a US-aligned framework.

Strategic documents, joint statements and defence dialogues all subtly reinforced this narrative, portraying India not just as a partner, but as a pillar of America's regional calculus.

However, the language of the latest defence pact tells a different story. Where previous agreements emphasised leadership, dominance and influence, the recent pact repeatedly invokes the term 'balance of power'.

In diplomacy, words are rarely accidental, and this semantic shift carries strategic weight. While 'dominance' implies initiative, authority and the ability to shape outcomes, 'balance' signals parity, containment and mutual management.

This subtle recalibration reflects broader geopolitical calculations. Washington appears to have tempered its ambitions for India, preferring a stable partner over a dominant one.

It is a strategy aimed less at amplifying India's influence and more at containing unpredictability, ensuring no single regional actor, India included, disrupts the broader American vision for Asia. In effect, India has transitioned to being one spoke in a larger wheel, a participant rather than a protagonist.

Washington's framing suggests that any effort by New Delhi to assert primacy, even in its immediate neighbourhood, must be carefully calibrated to avoid upsetting the US-managed equilibrium. 'Balance' does not imply leadership; it implies parity.

India is a partner, not the regional architect. For India, the message is clear: ambition is permitted, but it must be managed, and every step towards independent leadership will be measured against the backdrop of US strategic priorities.

The challenge for India now will be to assert autonomy while navigating this calibrated framework, leveraging opportunities for growth and regional engagement without triggering friction with its strategic partner. In practical terms, this will require more nuanced diplomacy, flexible security postures, and careful messaging at multilateral forums.

The renewed US-India pact may appear as continuity on paper, but in tone, nuance and implication, it marks a turning point in the bilateral relationship. The diplomatic language is subtle, but the message is clear: India's wings have been clipped, not through confrontation, but through reframed expectations, managed containment and calibrated balance.

Capt Abid Hassan
Istanbul, Turkiye

Epitome of nobility

THIS is with reference to the report 'Former Sindh CM Aftab Shaban Mirani passes away' (Nov 2). Mirani, hailing from Shikarpur, belonged to a rare class of politicians. His death has been widely mourned by colleagues and admirers across Pakistan. Simple, honest and principled, Mirani represented a vanishing breed in politics.

His humility and composure, even in power, set him apart from the pomp and vanity that define today's political culture. A calm, courteous and articulate parliamentarian, he was admired even by critics for his enviable qualities of head and heart. No allegations of corruption ever stained his career.

Mirani's political career was long and eventful. He was his party's presidential candidate against Rafiq Ahmed Tarar — a testament to the trust reposed in him by the party leadership. His long career brought him close to the corridors of power. He enjoyed cordial relations with senior politicians, military officers and bureaucrats, and, being aware of Pakistan's shifting landscapes, he could have penned several books, but, despite the persuasions of many, he never attempted to write his memoirs, taking with him a treasure of untold stories and political insights.

Qamer Soomro
Shikarpur

Upgrading tracks

PAKISTAN Railways has been a lifeline for the nation, connecting cities, facilitating trade, and offering affordable travel to millions of people. However, the current condition of railway tracks across the country is alarming.

Many sections of the network are outdated, damaged and unsafe for high-speed or even routine train operations. Frequent derailments, delays and accidents have

become a painful reality, putting the lives of passengers at risk.

For the development and survival of Pakistan Railways, immediate upgradation of the entire track network is crucial. Modernising tracks with heavy-duty rails, concrete sleepers, and advanced signalling systems will improve operational safety, allow higher speeds, and ensure punctuality in train operations.

Upgraded infrastructure will also attract freight business back to the railway network, reducing road congestion and contributing to the national economy.

If urgent measures are not undrtaken, Pakistan Railways may face a complete shutdown in the future. The losses from derailments, damaged rolling stock, and loss of public trust are already pushing the department towards financial collapse.

As such, without a strong investment in infrastructure, the railway system will continue to deteriorate, ultimately leaving the country without its most affordable and one of the most environment-friendly modes of transportation.

It is time for the government, policymakers and all stakeholders to prioritise track upgradation. In fact, the safety of passengers and the future of Pakistan Railways depend on it.

Delay in action will only lead to more accidents, financial loss, and eventually the shutdown of this massive national asset that is something we cannot afford.

Muhammad Hussain Malik
Lahore

Vibrant museums

WHAT place does a museum hold in society? Is it merely the preservation of artefacts, or does its mandate extend beyond mere preservation to active dissemination of learning and cultivating cultural curiosity? Does a museum's purpose transcend custodianship and conservation? Honest answers to these questions decide the socio-educational role museums play in societies.

The Lahore Museum has — for almost two years now — been dynamically redefining and proactively reconceptualising museums' role in real time.

It has been curating a spectrum of intellectual engagements, and actively arranging various seminars, workshops, book launches and panel discussions, drawing in scholars, researchers, pedagogues and professors from fields as varied as history, architecture, archaeology and even political science.

Such sessions foster learning among the attendees on a diverse array of topics, enriching global scholarship in the process while also offering students from various universities an opportunity to reclaim their heritage, revisit their past, and reconnect with their own identity.

The Lahore Museum History Society, in particular, is proving to be a potent agent of stimulating intellectual curiosity and ideational engagement among pupils and professors alike, as it arranges discussions on themes as diverse as 'War, Memory and Identity', 'Revisiting Ghazali' and countless others that touch upon the history of the region and beyond.

By transforming itself into a thriving hub of scholarly discourse and knowledge exchange, the Lahore Museum has set a precedent, demonstrating the vital role that museums can play in the intellectual life of a social collectivity.

Qazi Muhammad Ahmad Qasmi
Chiniot

▶ **GREY SKIES:** Karachi is trapped under a thick layer of smog, a dangerous blend of smoke, dust and fog, that has turned the city's skyline into a blurry grey sheet these days. Citizens cannot breathe or see clearly during early mornings and late nights. Old vehicles emitting dark smoke, garbage burning, construction dust, and industrial waste have turned Karachi's air into a toxic mixture. There is no greenery left to absorb carbon dioxide and no serious action is taken by the authorities. Health experts warn that this smog can cause severe breathing problems, skin irritation and eye infections, especially among children and elderly people. The air feels heavier and more suffocating. Apparently, we are destined to breathe this air till we cannot breathe anymore.
Khadija Khan
Karachi

▶ **BLOCKED ROADS:** Traffic jams on Murree Road, Asghar Mall Road, Iran Road, Peshawar Road, Committee Chowk and Saddar cause great trouble to the people of Rawalpindi. I often arrive at my university behind schedule and miss classes. Poor traffic control, damaged and broken roads, encroachments and careless driving have together made life one big mess. The authorities concerned should manage traffic properly, repair damaged roads, remove encroachments, and ensure strict law-enforcement.
Mirza Ghuffran Baig
Rawalpindi

▶ **MORE JOBS FOR YOUTH:** The problem of unemployment among youth is getting worse in the country. Despite having degrees and skills, many young people are unable to find suitable jobs. This not only causes financial stress, but also leads to frustration and social problems. The government and the private sector should work together to create more job opportunities and promote skill-based training programmes. Encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting small businesses can also help reduce unemployment. It is high time the authorities took serious steps to ensure a better future for the youth.
Alishba
Rawalpindi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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